

Last year, we did take a key step in the right direction by passing the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. But make no mistake, Madam Speaker. That was the beginning, and we cannot allow it to end there.

I am grateful that my colleague, DAVID CICILLINE, plans to reintroduce an assault weapons ban. I, too, am choosing to act. I will soon reintroduce my bill to stop online ammunition sales.

Madam Speaker, I stand here confident that my Democratic colleagues will stand behind this commonsense legislation.

From Sandy Hook to Uvalde, from Monterey Park to Trenton, New Jersey, every mass shooting is a policy choice. Democrats are prepared to choose better, and I demand that my Republican colleagues do the same.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND THE DEBT CEILING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. LARSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Madam Speaker, Ronald Reagan was prescient in his description of Congress, especially as Congress addresses issues, most specifically, the debt ceiling.

Here is what Ronald Reagan had to say about Congress:

Congress consistently brings government to the edge of default before facing its responsibility. This brinkmanship threatens the holders of government bonds and those who rely on Social Security and veterans benefits.

Let me repeat that: those who rely on Social Security, you could add Medicare and veterans benefits.

That is what is at stake here.

Reagan went on to say:

Interest rates would skyrocket, instability would occur in the financial markets, and the Federal deficit would soar.

Why, then, would our colleagues on the other side of the aisle hold the American economy hostage?

In their own words: so they can cut Social Security and Medicare.

They call these programs entitlements.

For all of those listening to this, make sure you call your Member of Congress, and let them know that Social Security is not an entitlement. It is an earned benefit. It is something that people pay for weekly, biweekly, or monthly.

How do they know?

How do we trust and verify this?

All you have to do, Madam Speaker, is go to your pay stub. It says: FICA. That stands for Federal Insurance Contribution. That is Federal Insurance Contribution.

Whose?

Yours—the more than 66 million Americans who contribute to this program. It is an earned benefit. It is not an entitlement.

They clearly are entitled to their Social Security.

But here we have the ruse of the year. We are going to hold the American economy hostage so that we can make cuts to a program that Congress hasn't enhanced in more than 52 years on our watch—ours being every Member of Congress. We cannot let this persist.

Fortunately, because of hard work in the past, seniors are receiving a COLA this year because of COVID. But it has not been reformed, it is not permanent, and there hasn't been a benefit enhancement in 52 years.

In 1971, a loaf of bread cost 72 cents. I don't have to go through the litany of how costs have risen.

With 10,000 baby boomers a day becoming eligible for Social Security, this is not the time to cut the program. This is a time to enhance the program so that all of our seniors—especially those who were hit hardest by the epidemic.

How do we know this?

Of the more than 1 million people who passed away from the pandemic, over 750,000 are over the age of 65.

And who is impacted most by inflation?

Those people who are on a fixed income, and by definition, those on Social Security are on a fixed income and need our help the most during this time of inflation. It impacts every single district in this country.

On average, there are 147,000 Social Security recipients in every congressional district, and to deny them the enhancements that they need during this inflationary time and during a time period when Congress has not enhanced the program in more than 52 years is long overdue.

SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. CASTEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASTEN. Madam Speaker, this has been a bloody week in America. It seems like every day we have woken up to news of another mass shooting, starting with the one 5 days ago when a gunman, armed with an assault pistol and high-capacity magazine, killed 11 Californians as they celebrated Lunar New Year.

Three weeks from now, Valentine's Day will be the 15th anniversary of a mass shooting on the Northern Illinois University campus in DeKalb. The shooter started firing at 3:06 p.m. By 3:11 p.m.—just 5 minutes later—he had taken his own life. But not before firing off 55 rounds of ammunition, killing 6 people and injuring another 21.

In Parkland, Florida, on Valentine's Day they don't memorialize Northern Illinois University, they memorialize the anniversary of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. That shooting lasted for 6 minutes, 139 rounds were fired, 17 people were killed, and 17 were injured.

Six months from now, on Independence Day, folks in Highland Park, Illi-

nois, will be memorializing the first anniversary of a mass shooting when 83 rounds were fired, 7 people were killed, and 48 were injured before the police—who were present at the scene—could even identify the location of the shooter.

We do not get our holidays back unless we act.

Too often, this body has responded to these shootings with thoughts and prayers. Prayers that the American people won't notice that some of my colleagues are putting the economic interests of gun manufacturers ahead of people's lives. But every once in a while, we do act. I want to talk about what we are capable of when we are touched by the better angels of our nature.

To do that, let's flash back to another Valentine's Day not that long ago. Two Chicago gangs were fighting over narcotics turf. One of them surprised the other, and in a flash of bullets, seven people were dead. Chicagoans and Illinoisans—Americans—were outraged. Yes, these were gang members, but they didn't deserve to die.

The Saint Valentine's Day Massacre was in 1929. It was when Al Capone's Italian gang killed seven members of Bugs Moran's Irish gang as whiskey bootleggers fought over drug turf. And we acted. That shooting led to the passage of the National Firearms Act that banned civilian access to fully automatic Tommy guns and any rifle with a barrel longer than 18 inches.

That law is still on the books today. It saves lives, and no one has ever claimed it was unconstitutional.

By the way, Madam Speaker, if you weren't expecting that a story about Chicago gangs was going to be about White people, I would like to thank you for attending today's class in critical race theory. As that poet Ice Cube says: You better check yourself.

But I digress.

Seven people died in 1929, and we acted. Eleven people died on Lunar New Year 5 days ago. There have been 40 mass shootings in the first 26 days of this year, over 1,300 gun homicides in the United States this year, and another 1,700 gun suicides. I am proud that my State of Illinois has just passed an assault weapons ban. It is time for this body to do the same.

I know I speak for all Americans when I say that I want to enjoy my next holiday without fear of getting shot, and that inaction in the wake of way too many avoidable deaths is completely unacceptable.

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PRIORITIES FOR 118TH CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota). The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Nevada (Mrs. LEE) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I rise today for the first time during this